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SUBJECT: HUGE TURNOUT IN SA VOTER REGISTRATION-OBAMA'S VICTORY A
FACTOR?

11. (U) The South Africa Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) organized a voters registration drive during the weekend of November 8 and 9, 2008, in an effort to energize the younger citizens to participate in the 2009 election. From all accounts the campaign was a success. According to the IEC 3.6 millions people visited the 19,000 stations set up across the country. Of these 1.6 million became newly registered citizens to vote in the 2009 election. The IEC finally announced that 21.6 million voters are now registered to vote.

12. (U) In a statement the chairperson of the IEC, Ms Brigalia Bam, said "The IEC is delighted to see the success of the drive to register voters, especially the youth, who represent a majority of the weekend registration activity at 77.9%." The IEC set up a mechanism on their website which allowed citizens to check their status as voters. According to the CEO of the IEC, South Africans visited the website in huge numbers. "The IEC is probably the most visited website at the moment," said Ms Pansy Tlakula. She added that they also received thousands of text messages checking the registration details.

13. (U) In the weeks preceding November 8-9, a concerted media campaign involving print, radio and television drew the attention of young South Africans to the results of the U.S. elections with the message that "if change can be made in the most powerful nation on earth" citizens of this country can also motivate change by exercising their right to vote. Political analysts have suggested that the success of the voters' registration campaign could be attributed to the youth being inspired by the results of the U.S. elections. For example, the provincial paper, The Witness, said "U.S. election inspires young people to register on SA's voters roll." Additionally, the morning tabloid, The Times ran an article that said, "scratch beneath the surface of the IEC's numbers and it is clear that the young are more fired up than ever before about voting. Far more women than men registered to vote, a statistic that goes against the grain of all previous registration drives. Election 2009 promises to re-invigorate South African politics just as the incredible campaign of Barack Obama brought new life to U.S. politics."

14. (SBU) On November 19, Cape Town Poloff met with ANC MP Francois Beukman who told Poloff that he believes that the recent U.S. presidential election has inspired South Africans to register to vote in greater numbers than seen in the past, especially among the youth. He also said that the ANC had largely increased its voter registration numbers over the past weekend's voter registration drive in numbers that exceeded the ANC's expectations.